

# TESTIMONY REGARDING SB 379: An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force

By Chemay Morales  
To the Committee on Education  
3/7/2016

Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and distinguished members of the Education Committee:

My name is Chemay Morales, and I am a Sr. Equity coach and concerned Waterbury parent.

## **SB 379: An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force**

In support of **S.B. 379, AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MINORITY TEACHER RECRUITMENT TASK FORCE**: to delay the termination of the minority teacher recruitment task force, to establish the Minority Teacher Recruitment Policy Oversight Council within the Department of Education, and to require the Department of Education to conduct an annual survey of students regarding the effectiveness of minority teacher recruitment programs in the state.

High and disproportionate suspension rates in Waterbury are not a new issue. Black students make up 23% of the total student population (Waterbury Public School District Action Plan to Increase Representation of Black and Latino Educators, June 2015); however, make up 35% of disciplinary sanctions across the district (RACCE Data Request). We know that students in schools with stricter discipline policies, such as zero tolerance, (a practice not foreign to Waterbury) are less attached to their school (McNeely, Nonnomaker, & Blum, 2002). It should also be no surprise that students with discipline issues are less likely to complete high school, and discipline issues in earlier grades are predictive of discipline issues in latter grades (Tobin & Sugai, 1999). Given this long-term problem the district has been struggling with, it is vital school leaders invest in research-based solutions that steer away from failed, traditional, colorblind practices given the demographic make-up of the community according to the 2015 Waterbury Public School District Action Plan to Increase Representation of Black and Latino Educators (51% Hispanic, 23% Black, 21.9% White, and 4% Other).

While the majority of Waterbury students are of color, teachers and administrators do not mirror the same composition, making Whites the dominant face amongst staff. Nationally, Black and Latino students are more likely to be given out of school suspensions or expulsions for the same behavior than their White peers (Skiba et al., 2011). In November 2015, Adam Wright's study, "[Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Disruptive Behavior: The Effect of Racial Congruence and Consequences for School Suspension](#)," revealed that Black teachers have fewer negative views of Black student behavior than do White teachers. In fact, Wright's findings demonstrated that the more times a Black student is matched with a Black teacher, the less likely that student is to be suspended. The difference in suspension rates is so large that Wright estimates that if we doubled exposure of black students to Black teachers, the Black-White suspension gap would fall in half!

While Black (especially male) Waterbury students are disproportionately *over-represented* in the number of students receiving disciplinary sanctions, they are, by default, simultaneously *underrepresented* in accessing rigorous and academically challenging curricula, such as

A.P./honor classes and talented and gifted programs. According to [a new, national study](#) by Grissom and Redding (2016), their findings revealed that Black students are about half as likely as White students to be put on a "gifted" track — even when they have comparable test scores. However, the only factor that deleted this disparity was the race of their teachers. This research demonstrated that nonblack teachers identify Black students as gifted in reading 2.1 percent of the time. Black teachers, however, are three times more likely to identify Black students as gifted in reading: 6.2 percent of the time. That's the same rate as for white students, no matter the race of their teacher. Although talented and gifted classes no longer exist in the district, A.P. and honors is still offered. When looking at who is enrolled in these courses, as predicted, we see a significant *underrepresentation* of both Black and Hispanic students across all schools (who offer these courses) enrolled in these classes (See RACCE Data Request), in fact, making White students disproportionately overrepresented in comparison to their total composition in the district.

So, why does any of this matter? These patterns suggest that race absolutely matters in schools and that adopting a colorblind position when problem-solving racialized student outcomes only prevents school leaders from **seeing** the impact race plays when we consider it in our hiring practices.

Respectfully,

Chemay Morales  
Sr. Equity coach and concerned Waterbury parent  
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